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Monograph for Advanced Class, 61-I

"Hazards of the Military Life"

Submitted
by

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An Abstract On
" HAZARDS IN THE MILITARY "

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Hazards of the Military Life

- a. Purpose: To examine some of the demoralizing social and moral hazards of military life and to point out the spiritual resources available to the young soldier, to counteract these dangers.

- b. Scope: There are some problems that become more intense, more insistent and more frequent for the young men in military life. Youths, inducted into the service, are placed in a new and different environment separated from their families and friends. They must adjust rapidly to their new situations. They must face moral and social dangers to which previously they had not be exposed.

II

Introduction

Many people, who have had no direct relationship with the military, harbor strange ideas about the manner of life led by those connected with the military. The truth of the matter is military life is on a par with any other career which one may pursue. It is a way of life followed by men and women, young and middle-aged, members of families and unmarried. All are, as the rest of humans, bound to observe the Ten Commandments and to conform to the other norms of right living which bind all human beings no matter in what circumstances they find themselves.

This remains the fundamental truth, yet there are accidental circumstances in the military which bring about the existence of special problems and which call for a special kind of heroism.

Actually none of the dangers to be discussed are essentially peculiar to the Military. They are to be found in civilian life as well. But they are more concentrated, more insistent, more frequent for the average young man in the Armed Forces than would be the case under normal conditions of civilian life.

The reaction of young people to these special problems are full of variety and contrast. Some become "loners", almost recluses. Some become noisy, extraverts with few inhibitions. Others mature quickly, adjusting to their new

situation. They are a credit to themselves and their families.

III

Military Life Versus Civilian Life

Military life then differs from civilian life. The young man entering the military finds that certain liberties he has been accustomed to are now curtailed. Formerly he could decide himself on the clothes he would wear. He could cater to his own likes and dislikes in food. He was free to come and go. In the military it is quite different. His freedom of action is circumscribed by conditions over which he has no control. A uniform that makes him undistinguishable from thousands of other men is his ordinary apparel. His hunger is sated by mess-hall food. If he doesnot like it he may go hungry.

The youth coming into the service may be accustomed to having his own way at home. In fact, he may be spoiled or too independent. There is one lesson he must learn quickly. The military of necessity is built upon the firm foundation of obedience.

He may not like the First Sergeant. He may find the lieutenant overbearing. Their commands may seem ridiculous or unreasonable. Yet the soldier must obey, or else find himself in more and more trouble. He must do what he is told without consultation of his opinions, likes or dislikes.

If anyone looks at the matter objectively he can see the need for implicit obedience. The military is a large, unwieldy collection of individuals. Yet there is one single-minded purpose for the military: to provide an efficient force for maintaining order and defending the country against its enemies. To attain this mission there must be obedience all the way up and down the line.

The young soldier then will be living a new life in different surroundings. The normal youth will be able to adjust to the new situation without too much difficulty if with good will he realizes the necessity of serving his country in the Armed Forces.

IV Social Hazards

a) Human Respect

The young man as he first sets foot on a military post will usually be nervous, a little frightened and certainly lonesome. He will seek friendship and fellow-suffers. At this point he shapes his future actions. The group he chooses to join will be a force of good or evil for him.

He will be exposed to what some call "mob psychology". This danger has also been named "human Respect".

For our purpose, human respect may be said to mean to act wrongly against conviction through fear of what others might think. It is a false understanding of how the human mind

actually reacts to one who has the courage of his convictions concerning right and wrong.

Too often, because of his youth, a serviceman thinks he must prove that he is a man. So with his new friends an ordinarily self-respecting young man may take his first drink or to show his manhood may take that one additional drink that is the difference between sobriety and drunkenness.

b) Swearing

Language, too, is an index of his immaturity and insecurity. Now, at least to him, words enter his vocabulary. God's Name is frequently on his lips. Filthy and obscene talk becomes common place.

On many bulletin-boards in the Army we find the General Order of George Washington on this subject. Those words are worth repeating. "The General is sorry to be informed that the foolish and wicked practise of profane cursing and swearing, a vice hereto-fore little known in the American Army, is growing into fashion. He hopes the officers will, by example, as well as influence, endeavor to check it, and that both they and the men will reflect that we can have little hope of the blessing of heaven on our arms, if we insult it by our impiety and folly. Added to this, it is a vice so mean and low, without any temptation, that every man of sense and character detests and despises it." Manhood is never proved by swearing, by giving in to temptation.

The young man must be strong in his convictions, worrying not about what others may think of him. He must try not always to take the easy way, to follow the lead of those who are looking for a so called "good time". He must be determined to live his own life in accord with the correct moral and religious principles he has learned.

Whether or not he is to be influenced by others for evil or is to influence others for good will depend on the individual. He may not be the most popular man in the unit if he lives according to his convictions but he will be more admired than he ever realizes. Those who overcome human respect may at the same time be a good influence in bolstering the courage of others weaker than themselves.

V Moral Hazards

A young man has a wholesome need for female companionship. At home this need was fulfilled by his mother, sister, and girlfriends. Wherever he went he was constantly in contact with women as well as men. He was not likely to be crude, profane or obscene in his conversation with women. Upon entering barracks' life, however, he is faced with a new situation. In an all male environment there is an exposure to abuses in language. A few foul-mouthed individuals can quickly lower the moral tone of the whole barracks.

a) Sex

Some of these men, without any moral or religious back-

ground, look upon sex, not as something wonderful coming, as it does, from the Hand of God but rather as an animal urge that must be satisfied. Hence they discuss in great detail their latest conquest or sexual experience.

Then too there is the attitude of many of the older men with whom he comes in contact. They may inform him^How to protect himself against venereal disease. The immature may think that illicit sexual relations with women must be more or less the accepted thing and that most men indulge in them. The only thing is that he must be careful not to catch some disease.

Another group may have no moral standards themselves. Unfortunately, they frequently assume that no one else has moral standards either. This group may cause special difficulty for the young man who is not well versed in the reasons for his beliefs. He knows there are moral standards but cannot quite explain why. Unless his convictions are strong this young man will find his standards falling to the level of this group.

b) Drink

It is Catholic teaching that alcoholic liquor in itself is not something essentially wrong, as for example, contraceptives. The evil is found in its intemperate use, upon the proper use or abuse of something not wrong in itself.

The young man away from home, freed from parental restraint may fall into the habit of excessive drinking. The habit once begun can ruin a life and cause untold misery.

What this young man needs is ~~the~~ courage and strength. He should stand on his own two feet. He must face the pressure of life without fear and frustration, acknowledging his dependence on Almighty God. Drink is no solution to anything. If the young man finds from experience that he cannot drink with moderation it is better by far for him to stay away from all drink.

c) Stealing

There is one final hazard of the military life that we would like to discuss, stealing. An attitude is easily developed by which we look upon property as belonging to no one because it is marked US Army. Issue clothing and equipment are "fair game" as long as one is not caught taking them. This way of thinking is, of course, dangerous. Habits are formed which make, "The world owes me a living" a principle by which we live. It is important then to remember that moral standards do not change because one is in the military. To take what does not belong to you is stealing. Whether the property belongs to the government or an individual, it is still stealing.

There are then certain dangers to the moral life of the young soldier. We are not trying to portray military life as something terrible. It is not. However special dangers do exist.

What is the Chaplain's role in the life of the young man in the military? How can he aid the young man in overcoming and avoiding these hazards?

It might be well to remark that the only reason for a priest's being in the military is to serve Christ in the persons of Catholics in the Military Service. There is no other reason for his being a member of the Armed Forces. His main obligation then is to minister to the spiritual needs of his people. Because he is in the military he has a special understanding of the problems presented. The chaplain must make himself available to all of his parishioners. Frequently this means long hours in his office, but he has volunteered for this work. He is a part of the military family, prepared to be inconvenienced; willing to make personal sacrifices.

The young soldier should make himself known to the Catholic chaplain. It would take but a few moments for the Serviceman to do this. It may mean just shaking hands after Mass but there should be some personal contact.

Unfortunately the Catholic chaplain will not usually be able to search out the men of his faith. Because of the shortage of priests in the Army the Catholic Chaplain will normally have a great many men to administer to. If it is a combat organization there will not be enough priests to care for the individual units. Three or four battalions or more will be served by one Chaplain. In such cases the Serviceman must make the

first overture. He should approach the priest. Then if there is a need at some future date for advice or counsel, the soldier will know where and when he may find his priest.

a) Character Guidance Program

During his time in the Army the Serviceman attends a monthly Character Guidance Talk.

Army Regulations inform us that the Character Guidance Program is intended to fortify the individual with, among other things:

1. "An understanding of the dignity of man,
2. The logic of self-discipline,
3. An awareness of individual responsibility." 1.

That these are noble ambitions no one would deny. However we submit that these are impossible to attain when taught in a vacuum. Motives must be presented to the American Serviceman if he is to be reached. The proper motives must include supernatural ones. Hence so that no one's conscience may be violated it is suggested that the Chaplains give Character Guidance Talks only to the members of their own denominations. In this way the Catholic youth would hear his own clergyman speaking to him in a way to which he is accustomed. The same would apply to Protestant and Jewish youth. Those not affiliated with any church would be permitted to attend the talk of their choice.

It is believed that this system would be advantageous to all,

1. Army Regulation 600 - 30, Section 1, Paragraph 2b.

especially the young enlisted man. The wholesome influence of family, community and cultural heritage may best be continued when the Chaplain is able freely and openly to speak of his religious convictions. This can be done only when he and his listeners are members of the same Church.

Since the whole Character Guidance Program is intended for the good of the Serviceman it is suggested that means should be used to accomplish this purpose. For years we have been following the present system. It might be well for us honestly to re-appraise the Program to see in what manner it could be improved. Many think that the results have not been what was hoped for.

b) A Program for Catholic Servicemen

To help the young man know and face the dangers already mentioned in this paper, there are many thoughts that could be pointed out and emphasized in a Character Guidance Program if the Catholic Chaplain was speaking exclusively to Catholic personnel. Most of these ideas would of course be topics for sermons but Character Guidance Periods would be an ideal time for them to be discussed at length. To most the spiritual resources of his faith are well known but even the good Catholic needs to be reminded of them frequently. To the nominal Catholic it would be a means of his learning more about his faith and an aid to him^s becoming a better Christian.

Admittedly there are not enough Catholic Chaplains in the Army to carry out such a program in the manner invisioned. In

many situation it would be necessary to limit the Chaplain to area coverage. Administrative Catholic Chaplains would be obliged to give some of the talks. In other cases well informed Catholic laymen might be the solution. Certainly the effort involved in working out a Program in this manner would be worth while. The entire Character Guidance Program would be enhanced, made more profitable.

Major William E. Mayer, M.C. in an address about the American Prisoners of War in Korea, stated: "Well where should we be teaching this I wonder (collaboration). In the Army? You can sit back here at this moment and say, well now this fellow's talking about things which are basic to character, which are ethical and moral principles, and it's late when a man is 18 or 19 or 20 years old to teach him ethical and moral principles. And indeed it is late. It is not too late, however." 2. No, it is not too late. The Chaplain must take every opportunity to point out to his men the dangers they can expect to meet and how to counteract those hazards in a practical way.

To Catholic Servicemen it might be pointed out that it is not enough to have a "C" printed on his dog tags. It is necessary for him to live as a Catholic. This means that he attend Mass on Sundays and Holydays of obligation. In fact this is the least that he can do as a Catholic.

Yet we know that too many Catholic Servicemen fail in this

2. Major William E. Mayer, Medical Corps, U.S. Army, Address Delivered at Fort Slocum, New York, 25 February, 1957

duty. If they do not attend Mass they will, of course, fail to receive the Sacraments of Penance and Holy Communion. So they omit three of the great resources of their faith.

Daily prayer is certainly no less necessary in Military life than it is in civilian. As a believer in God, the least any of us can do is to raise our minds and hearts to our Creator each day. There is no reason why people can not pray in the military as well as out of it.

Experience has shown that those who attended Mass regularly, who frequently went to confession and received Holy Communion before entering the Service usually follow the same habits while in the military. If they prayed each morning and evening they will continue that habit no matter where they are. They are prepared to meet the temptations and dangers of life in or out of the Service.

Moral and ethical principles must be taught and repeated. The two years that men spend in the military must be time of preparation. They should be trained not only how to defend their country physically but also spiritually. The United States is a Christian nation. The country could be strengthened in the best possible way if we continue the training begun at home and in the schools by pointing out the eternal truths about God.

There is no reason for anyone to suffer a change of character in the Service of their nation. The service man should be strong enough to carry on his religious practices the same as he

did at home. The military should be but another phase of life with an opportunity for him to develop his character even in the face of adversity.

The sympathetic and energetic chaplain can help accomplish all of this by his program, teaching, example and interest.

VII

4-Conclusion

The Character Guidance Program

The Character Guidance Program should be revised along denominational lines. Classes could be scheduled at the same time in the unit so that Catholics might attend a talk given by the Catholic Chaplain; Protestants, the Protestant Chaplain; those who express no religious preference might attend either talk.

Discussion Topics would still be assigned by the office of the Chief of Chaplains. Development of the topic would be at the discrimination of the individual chaplain according to his religious beliefs.

Department of the Army Pamphlet 16-9 contains a list of Discussion Topics that are timely and necessary. The Moral subjects discussed are: Self-Discipline, Chastity, Our Moral Defenses, Patience, Worship in Life and Charity.

Yet in the foreward to to this pamphlet it states,

"The ideals and objectives which are stressed are such as may be garnered from our common heritage as American citizens. The ideals and objectives, while Moral, are not specifically religious." 1.

1. DA Pamphlet 16-9, p.11, paragraph 2.

It is true morals are not specifically religious. Yet Catholic belief and explanations of moral principles may differ from the explanations of other Faiths. So that the Catholic youth may have a better knowledge of the principle involved he should be able to attend talks given by the Catholic Chaplain.

"It is estimated that by 1963, 75 percent of all male population between the ages of 20 and 30 may be in or may have been in the Armed Forces." 2.

Thus the Armed Services have a responsibility to ensure that the youth of the Nation, entrusted to their care, are grounded in sound moral and spiritual values according to their own religious beliefs.

The Chaplain in his monthly Character Guidance Discussion should be able to develop a moral topic with freedom of thought, freedom of expression with members of his own church.

In 1958 Admiral Arleigh Burke said, "Without sound moral and spiritual values firmly rooted in the character of our people, our weapons become merely instruments of suicide. We achieve nothing if we seek only material power." 3.

To attain these desired objectives, to prepare our youth to meet the hazards of the Military life in a more efficacious manner the above changes in the Character Guidance Program are recommended.

2. Ibid, p.1, paragraph 1.

3. Admiral Arleigh Burke, Associated Press Article, 1 June 1958.

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THE HAZARDS OF MILITARY LIFE

There are many people who harbor strange ideas about the military according to Chaplain Messer. Rather than thinking of the service as a unique environment with totally new dangers, the writer feels that the same perils of civilian life are concentrated a little more. Swearing, sexual license, drunkenness, stealing, and lack of human respect are found in the home towns as well in the camp or post of the Army.

The psychological make-up of the individual will have a lot to do with the way he adjusts to his environment. Some will become "loners" while others will become an extravert with few inhibitions.

Our homes are prone to spoil each of us. This is the place where our tastes in food are met as individuals. In the military, a person may go hungry if he does not like the food that is offered to him. Even the clothes he must wear are prescribed by a total stranger.

There is no room for the individual likes or dislikes when the sergeants tell the soldiers to carry out a command. Obedience must be the primary goal in the service. However, this does not mean the person must lose his private convictions in the case of morals. He will prove his manhood by being the kind of individual that stands up for what he thinks is right.

Swearing can be an index of one's maturity. Chaplain Messner points out that the army is not interested in this being encouraged. Rather, he cites the General Order of George Washington's which told his men that he did not want to hear this sort of thing any longer.

A member of the armed forces must also realize that he or she will be surrounded by others who have come from a different background than their own. Sex must always be looked upon as a gift from God to be used in the right manner.

Drinking is not frowned on by the Catholic Church. However, the person away from home must guard against drunkenness. The habit of excessive drinking can ruin a life and cause a good deal of suffering.

Stealing is not unique to the military, but the attitude of justifying the theft of government articles or those things issued to fellow servicemen is dangerous. This is still stealing.

The main reason for the priest being in the Army is, "...to serve Christ in the persons of Catholics in the Military Service." He bemoans the fact that the priests serve so many units at a time. This prevents them from finding the Catholics. He recommends that the Catholic serviceman seeks out the priest so he will know his men. In Character Guidance, he recommends that Catholic Chaplains teach Catholic personnel. The same would be true of the Protestants and the Jews. Each would have his own chaplain of his own faith do the teaching.

James E. Hanson